

## A COAST RANGE FARM.

Old Jimmy Crenshaw the Lone Inhabitant, and How He Gains a Livelihood.

The Queerest Ranch, and the Strangest Crops Raised in the Country.

Skunks, Coyotes, Coons, Foxes and Other Animals as an Investment—A Visitor's Experience.

Away up in the mountains, back of Gravelly valley, says the San Francisco Examiner, in the northern part of Lake county, is one of the queerest towns to be found on the face of the earth. It is about fifty miles north of Lakeport, in the wildest portion of the coast range. The village is located in a little grove of laurel trees and almost entirely surrounded by high mountains. Scattered over the five acres of level ground are little houses of split lumber, while around the foot of the hill are several "dugouts," all well boarded up. A mountain stream runs through the center of the little town, forming a small pond at the lower end of the flat, from which it trickles over a precipitous rock nearly 100 feet in height. The nearest wagon road is twelve miles distant and the nearest neighbors something farther.

But the oddest circumstance in connection with the place is that only one human being lives there and that but one other person ever spent a night in the village. The inhabitants of Varnant Farm, as the place is known, are all animals and all carnivorous. Coons, foxes and skunks swarm around the little huts or lie in the sun in the doorways without evincing the least fear of man.

Old Jimmy Crenshaw, the lone human inhabitant of this gruesome place, has lived there so long that the "memory of man runneth not to the contrary." He is a little dried-up old man, with long white hair, keen blue eyes and a skin-like parchment. "Yes, sir," said he to a chance visitor, "I kem hyer in the fall of '83, an' feelin' tired ther night I struck ther pool er water, I planted my hams on a pepperwood log an' eluded ter camp. I see it wuz a likely spot fer game, so I unpacked my ax an' went ter work fixin' up this hyer shanty, an' I be'n hyer ever since."

"But how do you make your living here? You plant no crops."

"See ther gun? See them coons, an' foxes, an' skunks? I raise vurnant crops. Long late in ther fall when ther fur is good an' grub is short them fellers loose ther scalp, an' Uncle Jimmy (ther's me) was enough dour'n terbecker ter stan' off ther wet season. This is a vurnant as soon as I raise vurnants fer ther market. I jest tote ther hides off ter town an' trades 'em fer grub."

While he was talking a mammoth skunk stalked slowly in the door of the little cabin, his claws clicking upon the floor at each step. He yawned a couple of times and threw himself into a furry ball on the bear skin before the mud fireplace.

"Thet's O' Jim, named Jim, after me," said Crenshaw, jerking his thumb toward the giant megalomaniac. "He wuz the first skunk I ever ketches. I dug him out er hole down ther pond when he wuzn't bigger'n yer fist. He wuz such a little feller that I kept him. I raised the others—ther wuz six of 'em—an' then killed 'em fer ther pelts. They bring me \$5 apiece, too. I've raised many er one sense, but I don't get as much as I make."

"But are ther furs not spoiled by ther odor?"

"What odor yer talkin' 'bout? Does O' Jim stink?" inquired the old man indignantly. "Not much. Jest as soon as er litter er young uns are of' enough to toddle I ketches 'em an' it don't take more'n 'bout a second with ther knife er mine ter spile ther scatter-gun fer 'em. I had had luck with 'em this season though. I can't kill a blamed one till next year. I had my whole skunk crop spiled. Jest a few days afore I was gettin' ready ter kill 'em I went down to the skunk house fer sunnup an' found two big uns fightin'. Course I didn't want ther hides punched full o' holes an' spiled, an' I jumps and kicks 'em apart. One of 'em happened ter be a stray thet had dropped in from ther hills, an' when he turned his musket loose on me an' the other skunks I knowed ther crop wuz blighted. It'll take 'em a year ter get cleaned an' smellin' fresh agin."

"Ther ain't nothin' in coons an' foxes an' skunks any more. They don't none pay fer ther keep. The best payin' crop I raise is coyotes. I have ter keep them only er few days after ther 'born an' I get a better price fer 'em than any other vurnant. I raise 'bout fifty a year an' make a killin' ev'ry three months, jest before the board o' supervisors meets. I takes 'em over ther line inter Mendocino county an' kill 'em there. Yer see they give er bounty o' \$15 on ev'ry coyote skin, an' it don't make any difference whether it is one minute er one year o'. I gott'er saw ther vuz killed in ther county an' prove it by one witness ter get my money."

"My stock's kinder run down now. I can't take as good care o' the vurnants as I used ter. Les's see, I got 'bout thirty head o' skunks, twenty o' coons, 'bout eighteen foxes, an' ten head o' ol' coyotes an' two litters o' five each. I tried to cultivate badgers, but they wuz so scratchy an' stubborn thet I giv'e it up."

"Do you ever have any visitors here?"

Ther only man that ever stayed all night hyer besides me wuz a feller from Potter Valley named Joe Brewer. He had be'n out luntin' in the mountains 'tween hyer an' Gravelly Valley an' got lost, an' happened ter strike ther trail leadin' hyer. He hed run out er ammunition an' couldn't light a fire, so had ter keep er goin'. It wuz 'bout 10 o'clock at night when he struck ther pond down hyer, an' the first thing he did wuz ter run into three or four o' my big coons down ther ketchin' frogs. They looked purty big in ther dark, an' 'not knowin' what he hed run agin'st, he walked out around 'em. He saw a little cabin, an' when he opened ther door skunks commenced scatterin' in ev'ry direction. Then he struck two er three o' the coyote houses in succession, but when he see ther eyes glarin' in ther dark he made tracks purty lively. When I heard him yellin' I went ter see what wuz the row, an' found him mixed up with er litter o' young badgers an' the ol' ones workin' on his system tooth an' toe-nail. He looked like a harrow had run over him. I let him sleep in hyer, an' durin' the night o' Jim purty much scart him to death by crawlin' over his face. He wouldn't stay any longer, but limped out er the camp early next mornin'."

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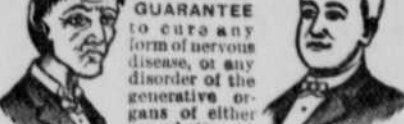
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